

Message Text

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AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: CONTINUED PRESSURE ON BONN COALITION

REF: BONN 0468

SUMMARY: WHILE THE PUBLIC ACRIMONY BETWEEN THE BONN COALITION PARTNERS HAS QUIETENED DOWN IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS, THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS REMAIN. THE TWO ISSUES WHICH ARE THE MOST TROUBLESOME TO THE SPD/FDP COALITION AT THE PRESENT TIME ARE THE REFORM OF THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM ("BERUFSBILDUNG") AND WORKER CODETERMINATION IN INDUSTRY ("MITBESTIMMUNG"). HOWEVER, THE PROBLEMS OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COALITION PARTNERS RUN DEEPER THAN THE DIFFERENCES ON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THESE SPECIFIC ISSUES AND REFLECT UNCERTAINTY ON THE

PART OF THE FDP AS TO HOW TO INSURE THE PARTY'S SURVIVAL AT THE POLLS. THE MAY 4 NORTH RHINE-WEST-PHALIAN (NRW) ELECTIONS AND THE ABILITY TO REACH A COMPROMISE ON THESE ISSUES WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT UPON THE SOCIAL-LIBERAL COALITION. END SUMMARY

1. FOLLOWING FDP SECRETARY GENERAL BANGEMANN'S ULTIMATUM TO THE SPD LAST JANUARY CONCERNING A COMPROMISE "MITBESTIMMUNG" BILL (REFTEL), THE MEDIA WAS FULL OF CHARGES AND COUNTERCHARGES. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE ATMOSPHERE IN BONN WAS ALSO STRAINED. SINCE THEN, HOWEVER, CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR GENSCHER HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN DAMPENING DOWN THE PUBLIC DEBATE EVEN THOUGH THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRACTICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES ON THESE ISSUES REMAIN UNRESOLVED. THE SITUATION IS FURTHER CHARGED BY THE FACT THAT THE SPD BELIEVES THAT THE LIBERALS ARE BACKING AWAY FROM THE COMPROMISE BILL THEY HAD ORIGINALLY AGREED TO. THE FDP CLAIMS (AT LEAST IN PRIVATE) THAT THE ORIGINAL COMPROMISE WAS A CONCESSION BY THEN PARTY CHAIRMAN SCHEEL IN RETURN FOR THE SPD'S SUPPORT OF HIS ELECTION TO THE FEDERAL PRESIDENCY AND AS SCHEEL IS NO LONGER FDP LEADER, THE LIBERALS CLAIM THE COMPROMISE AGREEMENT IS NO LONGER BINDING.

2. THE "BERUFSBILDUNG" REFORM DISAGREEMENT CENTERS AROUND THE QUESTION OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCING OF THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM WITH THE LIBERALS-- BELIEVING THEIR POSITION REFLECTS THE MAJORITY OF PUBLIC OPINION--TAKING A MORE CONSERVATIVE AND FRUGAL POSITION THAN THE SPD. THE ISSUE IS FURTHER COMPLICATED BY A DRAMATIC INCREASE IN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT WITHIN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC AND THE PERSONALIZATION OF THE DISPUTE AS A FRIDERICH (FDP VICE-CHAIRMAN AND POTENTIAL RIVAL TO GENSCHER) VERSUS ROHDE (SPD MINISTER OF EDUCATION) QUARREL. THERE IS ALSO THE FEELING ON THE PART OF SOME FDP INSIDERS THAT UNTIL RECENTLY THE LIBERALS HAD MADE MOST OF THE CONCESSIONS TO THE SPD IN THE COALITION AND NOW IT IS TIME FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING.

3. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE COALITION PARTNERS ARE NOT ONLY IDEOLOGICAL BUT ALSO REFLECT THE FDP'S INSECURITY ABOUT THE PARTY'S FUTURE. THE LIBERALS' WILLINGNESS TO TAKE ON THEIR BIGGER PARTNER AND ENDANGER THE BONN COALITION IS BASED ON TWO ASSUMPTIONS: (A) THE SPD WILL NOT CHANCE BREAKING UP THE

COALITION BEFORE THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS, AND
(B) TOO CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
IN THE PAST (THE SO-CALLED PROFILE PROBLEM) WAS
RESPONSIBLE FOR LIBERAL DECLINE AT THE POLLS IN RECENT
ELECTIONS AND IS A THREAT TO THE PARTY'S CONTINUED
EXISTENCE. ONE OF GENSCHER'S PERSONAL ASSISTANTS
DESCRIBED THE FDP PREDICAMENT TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER
AS A SITUATION IN WHICH EVERY DECISION HAS TO BE MADE
IN LIGHT OF HOW IT IS LIKELY TO AFFECT THE SURVIVAL OF

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THE PARTY ("ALLE ENTSCHEIDUNGEN SIND EXISTENZFRAGEN").
AS A CONSEQUENCE, DECISIONS ARE MADE ON THE BASIS OF

HOW THEY ARE LIKELY TO HELP OR HINDER THE FDP IN
SPECIFIC ELECTIONS (E.G., NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA).

4. WORKING IN FAVOR OF COMPROMISES ON "MITBESTIMMUNG"
AND "BERUFSBILDUNG" IS THAT BOTH PARTIES ARE COMMITTED
TO THESE REFORMS AND DO NOT WISH TO GO INTO THE ELEC-
TIONS WITHOUT HAVING FULFILLED THEIR CAMPAIGN PLEDGES.
IN ADDITION, BOTH SCHMIDT AND GENSCHER (UNLIKE SOME
OF HIS COLLEAGUES) ARE INTERESTED IN AVOIDING A HARDEN-
ING OF POSITIONS WHICH COULD ENDANGER THE BONN COALITION.
AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, SOME OF THE PERSONALITIES
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INVOLVED, ON BOTH SIDES, HAVE INVESTED THEIR PERSONAL
PRESTIGE ON THE OUTCOME, THUS MAKING COMPROMISES MORE
DIFFICULT.

5. SCHMIDT AND GENSCHER BELIEVE THAT THE BEST POLITICAL
STRATEGY IS TO REMAIN CALM, WEATHER THE STORMS OF THE
1975 LAENDER ELECTIONS, AND PRESERVE THE SOCIAL-LIBERAL
COALITION THROUGH THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS WHEN
THEY HOPE THE INTERNAL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PICTURE
WILL BE MORE FAVORABLE. IN THE MEANTIME, BOTH PARTIES
WILL KEEP AN EYE ON THE ELECTIONS IN BERLIN (WHERE THE
FDP IS PLEDGED TO A COALITION WITH THE SPD) AND IN
RHINELAND-PALATINATE (WHERE THE FDP HAS OFFERED TO GO
INTO A COALITION WITH THE CDU IN THE UNLIKELY CASE THAT
THE UNION DOES NOT OBTAIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY). THE
KEY, HOWEVER, REMAINS THE NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIAN
ELECTION ON MAY 4. THE COALITION PARTNERS HOPE THAT
COMPROMISES CAN BE WORKED OUT ON "MITBESTIMMUNG" AND
"BERUFSBILDUNG" AND THAT DRAFT BILLS CAN BE SUBMITTED
TO THE BUNDESTAG BEFORE THE NRW ELECTION. WITH THESE
TWO BONES OF CONTENTION OUT OF THE WAY, EVEN IF THE
CDU TAKES OVER THE REIGNS OF GOVERNMENT IN DUSSELDORF
THE SOCIAL-LIBERAL COALITION IN BONN COULD ENDURE

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AND WORK IN TANDEM IN PREPARING FOR THE 1976 BUNDESTAG
ELECTIONS. ONE QUALIFICATION IS IN ORDER. IF THE FDP
FELL BELOW THE FIVE PERCENT MARK IN NRW (AND THUS FAILED
TO BE REPRESENTED IN THE NEW STATE PARLIAMENT), THE
SHOCK EFFECT WITHIN THE PARTY WOULD BE SEVERE. UNDER
THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE SITUATION IN THE FDP MIGHT
BECOME SO UNCERTAIN AS TO PUT IN
QUESTION THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE BONN COALITION.
HILLENBRAND

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